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Paper #2

Introduction to Literature 131

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Poetry and Emotion

T. S. Eliot was borne and raised in a prominent family of St. Louis Missouri where he was one of six children. T.S. Eliot was a very well educated man and in 1948 he received the “Nobel Prize in Literature” along with quite a few additional times of formal recognition(T.S. Eliot, Wikipedia). During his lifetime he had written many controversial poetry that were all published such as “The Waste Land, The Hollow Men, Ash Wednesday, Four Quartets”(T.S. Eliot, Wikipedia). “T. S. Eliot has been one of the most daring innovators of twentieth-century poetry. Never compromising either with the public or indeed with language itself, he has followed his belief that poetry should aim at a representation of complexities of modern civilization in language and that such representation leads to difficult poetry. Despite this difficulty his influence on modern poetic diction has been immense” (T.S. Eliot – Biography)

T. S. Eliot had experienced a nervous breakdown and conflict within himself spiritually along with feeling alienated. His poetry is about his conflict within himself and was even anti-Semitic in his belief.

T. S. Eliot believed that poetry should be a representation of how someone should feel and believe, but not a representation of oneself. T.S. Eliot had a gift of the English language to express one’s thoughts and feeling without letting the reader know what he is feeling or thinking. T.S. Eliot believed that “tradition is a matter of much wider significance. It cannot be inherited, and if you want it you must obtain it by great labour” (Eliot’s “Tradition and the Individual Talent”). When reading his biography and Life and Career one comes to the conclusion that T. S. Eliot had a very unhappy life with lots of conflict and questions. This conflict comes out in his writing. T.S. Eliot writing was influenced by living in America and England where he became a British citizen after the marriage of his first wife.

In Poetry and Emotion it is stated “Poetry is not a turning loose of emotions, but an escape from emotion; it is not the expression of personality, but an escape of personality” (Introduction-to-literature). One gets the impression that in poetry one doesn’t want to demonstrate the emotions one is feeling but to run away from the emotions. As for the expression of personality you first have to have personality in order to escape from personality. One can gather from the statement about personality that with poetry one should write the personality in almost a third party sense, because you don’t want to show the reader the emotion or personality of the poet but let the reader feel the sense of emotion and personality. So in writing poetry this way the personality and emotion of the character is up to the interpretation of the reader.

Like with “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock” where T.S. Eliot is leaving this poem interpretation to the reader of this man’s personality and emotional state. T.S. Eliot is giving the reader very good description of thought with his unique usage of the English language. “Let us go then, you and I, When the evening is spread out against the sky, Like a patient etherized upon a table;”(Eliot, The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock) is J. Alfred Prufrock afraid of death or is it just an unusual description of how quiet the night is. Is it fear or frustration with women that T.S. Eliot described in “And would it have been worth it, after all, after the cups, the marmalade, the tea, Among the porcelain, among some talk of you and me” also “In the room the women come and go, talking of Michelangelo”(Eliot, The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock). Could it be that he had anxiety issues in dealing with women? “If one, settling a pillow by her head, Should say: “That is not what I meant at all. That is not it at all” (Eliot, The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock). All through this poem you experience different aspects of one’s life. Is T.S. Eliot talking about having lived a full life as one might think from the following lines “For I have known them all already, known them all:-- Have know the evenings, morning, afternoons, I have measured out my life with coffee spoons: I know the voices dying with a dying fall” and then he states death again “To say: “ I am Lazarus, come for the dead, come back to tell you all, I shall tell you all”—“(Eliot, The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock). One starts to wonder if this poetry is about life and death with all the experience one has between birth and death. Also, that this person is afraid of dying, but also just as afraid to live so he is in a world of limbo.

T.S. Eliot has expressed, and I have quoted earlier that “…Poetry is not a turning loose of emotion, but an escape from emotion; it is not the expression of personality, but an escape from personality” (Poem and Emotion). If this is the case, who is he really writing about in “The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock”? One can get a good impression of what T.S. Eliot is describing in The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock by listening to him read it.

If T.S. Eliot believes not to let loose of emotions nor express personality of one, when writing poetry then who is he referring to in this one? One could come to the conclusion that he is writing about someone he knows or has heard of. Upon reading different articles on T.S. Eliot one is lead to believe that he has had some conflicts and unhappy times within his life in which this person has come to the conclusion that T.S. Eliot writes about his life experiences and trauma by doing so in third person.

Worked Cited

"T. S. Eliot." Wikipedia. 04 Mar. 2008 <http://www.en.wikipedia.org>.

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